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A Quick Word From the Author

Thank you soooo much for deciding to read my fanfiction about Glory and the gang! This story has taken me absolutely AGES, so please take the time to upvote each and every chapter that stands out to you. It takes hardly any time and really helps me out a lot.

With that said, enjoy the story!

Chapter One - Too Close

It all happened so fast. Peril — the champion of the notorious Queen Scarlet — had been paired up against one of the renowned dragonets of destiny: Clay. Of course, being born with too much fire caused Peril to burn anything to the slightest touch. Clay, being born from a blood-red egg, was immune to fire, and able to touch Peril. As they fought, Scarlet was too caught up in who-would-kill-who, she didn't notice that her "art" was awake, and had a deadly weapon.

The RainWing easily snapped her thin, metal chains that bound her to the boulder, and took flight. As she opened her mouth to spit her deadly venom at where the two allies sat. Scarlet felt Burn who was there watching the fight alongside Scarlet, pushed Queen Scarlet in front of her, and took off into the air. Queen Scarlet barely had enough time to react. She managed to tuck-and-roll just as the venom came down, spraying her throne instead.

Without a moment's hesitation, Scarlet leaped into the air and grabbed for the RainWing. Before the dragonet could move, Scarlet smacked her tail into her side, and seized the Dragonet of Destiny's snout, preventing her from trying another killing strike.

"Grab the chains and help me." The RainWing immediately changed the color of her scales to match her surroundings, but Scarlet held a firm grip on her mouth and hissed, "Not this time RainWing!" She spat the word 'RainWing' like it was an unpleasant taste in her mouth.

Not a moment too soon, the guards were by her side, snapping the dragon's mouth shut with chains. They bound her wings to her sides and weighed her tail down with rocks.

"Now put her over there, in between that SeaWing and SandWing. Make sure there are guards on her at all times. And you," she

pointed to a SkyWing Guard, "Chain the MudWing back up. Peril, come with me."

Peril slunk over to the queen in shame that she didn't - couldn't - kill that MudWing. The RainWing hissed and growled, thrashing her hind legs fiercely, trying to get out of the SkyWings' grasps. A SandWing - part of Burn's dragons - flapped over to help the struggling SkyWings, aiming her poisonous tail at the struggling dragon.

"Come," was all Queen Scarlet said to Burn before stalking off to her fortress with several other furious SkyWings following closely behind her.,

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"What are we going to do about that RainWing Your Majesty?" A blood-red SkyWing asked, his voice sounding concerned, but also curious.

"She will fight in the arena, of course, Vermilion," she addressed the SkyWing matter-of-factly.

"But won't she just spray her venom at you the moment her mouth is free, Queen Scarlet?" Another dragon asked, his scales were almost orange like the sun, and he had a golden snout. After glaring at Peril for playing with her talons, she replied," Well we wouldn't take the binds off her mouth, Crimson. She would have to fight like any other dragon: with her claws."

"She should fight that annoying SeaWing. Two Dragonets of Destiny against each other in the arena, that should be entertaining. "Burn spoke smoothly. Her voice was unnerving like she was the one will the deadly venom, instead of the RainWing.

"Yes," Scarlet began slowly, "that would be a sight to behold."

"You can't kill Clay's friends!" Peril burst out suddenly, then quickly

regretted it.

"What is that you say, peculiar SkyWing?" Burn asked, slightly amused.

"I mean — you can't — I just..."

"Wanted to kill them yourself, " Burn finished for her, making Peril flinch.

"You've been seeing that MudWing again haven't you, " Scarlet demanded angrily, digging her claws into the ground.

"Yes," she said indignantly, "why shouldn't I?"

"Because you are loyal to Queen Scarlet and me," Burn cut in before Scarlet could say anything against it.

"Unless you have changed your mind?" Peril stared at her claws without saying a word, her scales smoking from the fire inside her.

"That's what I thought. Tomorrow, you will fight both the SeaWing and the RainWing. "Peril nodded slowly, her head still bent.

Tomorrow, Scarlet thought. Tomorrow I will get my revenge.

Chapter Two - A Fight to Remember

The trumpets blared, and every dragon took their seats. The arena was crowded with MudWings, SandWings, and SkyWings. The sky was clear, and the sun blazed down on them, its golden rays lighting up the arena. As soon as Queen Scarlet came into view, the crowd hissed with respect. Vermilion - the SkyWing prince - clapped his wings together to get everyone's attention after the Queen sat down along with Burn.

"Hello everyone!" He shouted. "Thank you for coming. Today we have a *very* special fight planned for all of you. Please welcome Tsunami of the SeaWings!"

Several burly SkyWings brought in a writhing, hissing, blue dragon. The guards had several long cuts along their snout and neck that were trickling blood. As soon as they dropped the SeaWing onto the arena floor, they jumped quickly out of the way in order to avoid getting slapped by her tail or feel her claws and teeth rip through their scales.

Next, the guards dumped a furious RainWing (probably the only one any dragon has ever seen fight), into the arena. She had several gashes that had just started to scab over. It looked as if she had been struggling against the guards just as Tsunami had, but decided to look a little less like a crazed, attack-first-think-later sort of dragon, sticking her nose into the air defiantly. She strutted over to Tsunami, and sat down. Her gaze swept over the crowd until it rested on Queen Scarlet and Burn. The Queen of the SkyWings met her gaze triumphantly.

"Here we have Glory of the RainWings, who tried to kill our beloved queen." There were many boos from the crowd, but Glory glared at them making some of the dragons flinch.

"Last, but certainly not least, we have Peril of the SkyWings our champion fighter!" There were several claps, but otherwise the crowd was silent.

"Most of you already know this, but for those of you who don't, these two dragons, "Vermilion pointed to Tsunami and Glory, "Are the dragonets of destiny." Scarlet grinned maliciously as some of the dragons listening practically fell out of their seats in shock. A RainWing? How could a dragon from that worthless tribe ever replace the SkyWing dragonet *destined* to save all of Pyrrhia?

"Should I wait to start the fight any longer?" Vermilion asked the crowd, and heard shouts of "No!" and "Hurry up with it already!"

"Now what everyone is here for, let the fight begin!"

Tsunami ran right up to Glory and tried to rip the bindings on her mouth.

"Ouch! I fels ly ur rippin my fay off!"Glory shouted through clenched teeth. Tsunami rolled her eyes, then decided to actually access the situation (which was generally unusual for her). She had watched Peril from up where she had been chained up and knew that no one had defeated her yet. Looking around she saw nothing she could defend herself with. The ground was just sand and dirt, and her wings were bound so there was no chance of them escaping to the sky.

"Glory, what can we possibly do against her?!" The RainWing didn't answer. Her eyes were focused on something on the other side of the arena.

"What is it? What are you looking at?" She stared hard in the direction Glory was facing but saw nothing that could be used against the SkyWing.

While the two dragonets were looking for anything to use against a dragon that could melt your scales by just touching them, Peril had sat down in the dirt. She kept glancing at Queen Scarlet, then her opponents and back again. There was no way out of this, she would

just have to kill them quickly. "Finish them!" Scarlet hissed when she caught Peril's eyes on her.

Peril turned away from Queen Scarlet and watched as the SeaWing tried communicating to her friend. She took a step towards them.

"Don't do it! Please Peril!" That sounded like Clay. She kept her eyes on the ground and took a deep breath. She had to kill them, it was the only way.

Suddenly, Glory leaped from where she had been standing with Tsunami moments before and leapt over Peril.

"Wha..." Peril managed to say before an explosion of pain came from her back. Her legs gave way and she fell to the ground in a fiery heap. Dragons in the audience screamed for they had expected Peril to easily kill her opponents with a single touch from her claws.

As luck would have it for the Dragonets of Destiny, earlier that day Tsunami had knocked over a pole with her tail while trying to free herself from several guards. This pole happened to land in the arena and was made of a very special material: neverburn. As the name implies, this type of rock can never catch on fire or be melted by it. When Glory landed on the other side of Peril, it was only a matter of seconds before she picked up the pole in her talons and plunged into Peril's back.

Every dragon was on their feet, excluding the ones who had flown away in fright, of course. Tsunami glanced up at Clay who's eyes were blurry with grief, and almost went tumbling off the edge. Burn had a look of surprise on her face, but Scarlets was contorted with rage. She and her guards were on the dragonets in seconds binding Glory and Tsunami - who didn't even struggle because even they were in shock. The guards started to haul the two dragons back to their platforms above the arena when they were stopped by none other than the queen herself.

"Wait," Scarlet began," Take that acid-spitting murderer into the palace. I have something special planned for her."

Chapter Three - First Punishment

Glory paced restlessly in her cell. It was probably early morning, but instead of the sun lighting her dark prison, there were only a few torches. *What 'special' thing does she have planned for me*, Glory wondered angrily. *What would she want to do to me? Obviously cause me pain, that's how Quee- No! She isn't* my *queen. Scarlet. That's what I must call her from now on. That's how Scarlet thinks.* Then a disturbing thought came to her about what that 'special' thing might be. Before she got a chance to dwell on this, however, footsteps sounded in the hallway.

"It's your lucky day RainWing," Glory heard the dragon sneer and knew he could only be referring to her. "Queen Scarlet, out of the kindness of her heart has decided to let you live... For now." He smirked and opened her cage, only to wrap a chain around her neck. Glory tried to resist, but it was hard to do when your wings were clamped to your sides, your mouth clamped shut, and your tail had a weight tied to the end of it so you couldn't whack the annoying dragon in the face.

He pulled on the chain and led Glory through the maze-like palace belonging to Scarlet. Many of the dragons quickly jumped out of the way when she walked near them. Glory hissed in annoyance at being led like a young dragonet. Then she remembered Tsunami and how they had been separated after the fight. *What did they do to her? Are they just going to make her fight more in the arena, or use her against me?*

The dragon stopped, and Glory almost ran into him. He knocked on the door, where Scarlet was no doubt lurking.

"I have brought the RainWing for you, Your Majesty." He shouted through the closed doors.

"You may come in Vulture."

The SkyWing -- Vulture -- opened the doors and marched into the room head low. Once he was several wing-lengths from Scarlet, he bowed deeply, until she gave him the order to rise. Scarlet had taken off her jewels and other accessories, replacing them with thin black chains around her neck and right wrist. She sat on her bejeweled throne, her tail over her claws and sitting up straight with the posture of a queen. not that she deserved to be one that is.

"You may leave now," Scarlet told Vulture, angling her wing towards the giant stone doors they had come through earlier.

"Yes, My Queen. Thank you." He bowed again then walked away, ignoring Glory.

"We haven't *formally* met," she heard a dragon slither out of the shadows. Burn.

"Hello, RainWing. I am the future queen of the SandWings. *Queen* Burn." The SandWing smiled when Glory's eyes flickered to her bloodstained claws.

"As you obviously know already, I am Queen Scarlet of the SkyWings, and I believe there should be a punishment for trying to murder *two queens* on the same day." Glory flicked her tail furiously, unable to speak a word.

"I am well aware that communicating would be nearly impossible in his state," Scarlet gestured to the metal binding her snout, "Luckily, you won't need to speak. You have probably guessed what your punishment is at this point. We can't let a rogue RainWing fly around with her fangs out, shooting acid at undeserving dragons whenever she feels like it. Obviously, to avoid the unfortunate consequences of burning acid, we have decided that removing your fangs is the only way to keep other dragons safe from you."

Glory muttered something under her voice that sounded a lot like "coward".

Scarlet was on her in an instant. Her claws gripped tightly around Glory's neck and dug into her back legs. Scarlet put her snout only inches from Glory's face and whispered into her ear.

"Don't ever call me a coward again," she spat furiously. Then she jumped off of her and in one fluent movement grabbed her tail in her mouth -- the weak spot on a dragons tail -- and bit down as hard as she could. The sound of a muffled scream bounced off the palace walls.

"Am I clear?" Scarlet questioned, face-to-face with Glory again.

After a few painful seconds, Glory muttered through clenched teeth, "Crystal."

"Then it is final," Scarlet turned around to leave," Part one of your punishment will happen tonight." She smiled to herself, then walked out with Burn after signaling the guards to take Glory back to her prison cell.

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It had all happened so fast. Wait, what happened so fast? She couldn't remember, in fact, she couldn't remember anything. Her body ached all over. Peril tried to open her eyes, but it was blurry. She had already tried to stand up, but that hadn't worked. *Peril. How can I remember my name but nothing else?* She closed her eyes and just before falling asleep she noticed how much her body was shivering.

Chapter Four - Fire Extinguished

Peril woke up again, feeling a lot more energized. *What is going on?* She was still a little dizzy after passing out from exhaustion. She slowly got to her feet and looked around at her surroundings for the first time since waking. There were dragon bones everywhere. Some of the dragons had died recently and currently hosted several vultures feasting on a free meal. Peril felt like vomiting.

Why am I here? I didn't die, so why would I have woke up here? It just didn't add up. She took a risk and jumped into the sky. Her wings were shaky, but she was flying! Peril wasn't sure if she would have the strength, but apparently her nap had helped more than she had thought at first.

Now, what should I do? She wondered before spotting a red and gold dragon that looked as if it was standing guard. She flew as fast as her tired wings could carry her. Finally, she stood in front of the dragon. A SkyWing guard name Gale. Another random memory she had from the past.

"Excuse me, but can you tell me where..." The dragon had yelped in fright as if he had seen a ghost and quickly got out of her way.

"If you won't help me, then I'll go ask someone else," Peril snorted in annoyance. She was just asking! After a moment of gaping at her, the SkyWing blinked once and bolted towards the palace. *It's* freezing *out here!* She thought trying to breathe a plume of fire. Not even a plume of smoke came from her nostrils. *I guess I'm too cold, Peril* shrugged

She flew closer to the palace, sometimes through crowds of dragons. Once she heard a dragon shout "Ghost!" Peril had looked around in fear until she realized other dragons were pointing at her. Every dragon was careful to move out of her way.

"I'm not a ghost!" She shouted angrily. "Here, touch my arm and see for yourself." She reached out her arm to a young dragonet and soon figured out this was a mistake. The dragon's mother hissed at her and quickly snatched the wide-eyed dragonet away from her outstretched arm.

"You monster," Peril heard another dragon mumble under his breath.

"Who called me a monster!" She roared. All but one dragon scrambled out of the way.

"Me." It was Hawk, a dragon about Peril's age. She had had a huge crush on this dragon in her younger years, but for some reason, Peril couldn't recall ever going near him.

"Why did you just call me a monster?" Peril hissed, taking one step towards Hawk. He flinched but stood his ground.

"Do you know how many dragons you have murdered? How many lives you have taken with just the touch of your claw?"

Peril closed her eyes and steadied herself. When she opened her mouth to speak, but no words would leave her. There were words going through her head, however. Murderer and killer rang particularly loudly in her head. She didn't remember anything like that. *Or do I?*

She tried to search through her memories. First, there was nothing. Then something inside her stirred. The smell of burning scales. Dragons screaming. Dying even.

She couldn't take it. Peril snapped open her wings and took off into the sky. Tears streaming down her face.

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"Queen Scarlet!" One of her guards came rushing into her throne

room, bowing low to the ground. "Your Majesty, you won't believe it.!"

"Yes. What is it, Gale?" Scarlet demanded. She wasn't scared of what the dragon might say. A queen must never show weakness. She *was* curious, however.

Gale's eyes traveled from the floor, landing on Queen Scarlet. "It's Peril, Your Highness. She's back."

The guard took a step back just in case, but Scarlet just sat there, her mouth open in disbelief.

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The news of Peril's return traveled through the kingdom of Sky quickly. Even into the depths of the dungeons.

Glory's guard came to check on his prisoner, and make sure she was still there. Glory stared at him, hopeful of any news from the outside.

"You'll like what I have to tell you RainWing." Glory had gotten used to being called "RainWing" instead of her real name.

"Peril is back from the dead, and I reckon she'll want revenge."

Chapter Five - Peril

Glory gulped. Peril was dangerous, and if she wanted revenge, she was going to get it. This was all too much. First, her front fangs would be pulled, so no more venom. Next, there was the news of Peril's return! How was that even possible? She remembered too clearly stabbing her in the back with the pole made from neverburn. Glory suddenly felt very weary and collapsed on the cold, stone floor of her cell, falling asleep in seconds.

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"Peril! Peril, wait!" Hawk shouted after her. Lucky for him, Peril was still recovering from her terrible morning and possible brush with death. He flew as fast as his wings could carry him and almost lost her when decided to soar through the mountains around boulders and through a canyon. Finally, Peril could fly no more, and she spiraled into a cave. Hawk followed her cautiously.

"What's wrong?" Hawk demanded as he landed next to her, but not too close.

"Who am I?" It was one of the simplest, and most confusing questions Hawk had ever been asked.

"What do you mean?" He questioned, leaning in to make sure he had heard her right.

"Who is Peril?" She looked up at him, her eyes searching his for answers.

"You don't remember?"

"Not anything since waking up on the piles of dead dragon bones this morning." She replied, shivering at the thought of ever going back there.

"Well, she -- you -- were the queen's champion. You were born with too much fire and..."

"Wait a second, *too much* fire?" She tried again to blow fire, but not even a flicker of a flame would present itself. Peril peered back at Hawk. His mouth was wide open in shock.

"But, that's impossible! You have no fire now? None at all?" She shook her head miserably.

"You could burn dragons from the slightest touch, but now it doesn't seem like you would even warm them. Not that we would have a way to test --" Peril flicked her tail against his before he could protest. He yelped in surprise, but when he examined it closely, there was not a single burn mark. He carefully stepped towards Peril. Then one more. Now there was only a foot between their snouts. He reached out and touched her talons. Cold. One might even guess she was an IceWing.

Peril scooted away and coughed a little. Hawk's face turned a deeper red than his scales and he moved away as well.

"How did I die?" Peril asked innocently. Hawk was reluctant to answer. It wasn't like he cared for the RainWing, but he knew the colorful dragon had only attacked in self-defense, and he didn't want to cause an unnecessary death. *If Queen Scarlet hasn't killed her already, that is.*

"Glory the RainWing. She was the one who killed you."

Chapter Six - The Strangers

Glory slowly woke up. She had a terrible headache, and when she tried to sit up, her body felt stiff as a statue. Opening her eyes she looked around. Her heart skipped a beat when Glory realized where she was. Her body was strapped to a table and she could see other dragons gathered around her. She heard Scarlet laughing at her as one of the dragon's reached towards her open mouth and using a special tool, clamped it onto one of her fangs. Suddenly Glory's heart was pounding. The dragon Glory now noticed to be Peril, yanked the tooth out of her mouth in one fluid motion. Glory screamed in agony.

"Don't worry, only one left to go," Scarlet sneered, then a different dragon came to pull out the next tooth. This time it was Morrowseer. Glory squirmed, trying hard to break free, but Morrowseer already had the tool around her next fang...

Glory woke up from the nightmare, and heard voices coming towards her. That was just a dream, but now it was for real. The voices were hushed, but RainWings had good hearing, so she listened intently.

"We are going to be in *so much trouble*," It was a male's voice, but not one she recognized. The dragon that spoke next though was one she could ever forget. *But, that's not possible...*

"Yes, but the queen won't hurt me. Also, we will only be in trouble if we get caught," Peril pointed out, a hint of a smile in her tone.

"She will once she knows you've lost your fire," the male argued. "As for me, I will get in trouble for sure!"

"Well, I'm not going to just leave, Hawk, not when I know that RainWing is trapped in this dungeon."

"You don't have to get revenge Peril," Hawk put in desperately.

Glory tensed as the two dragons stepped up to the door leading into her cell. Glory heard the sound of what she guessed were keys clinking against the door. After several minutes, the lock clicked and the door opened.

Glory growled at the strangers and struggled against her chains, but it was no use. There was no way Glory could escape, Scarlet had made sure of that.

The male dragon, Hawk, shuffled nervously away from Glory when the door opened. The female stepped up to her with confidence, causing Glory to growl louder.

"Relax," said the orange female, "I'm not going to hurt you." Glory rolled her eyes. Whatever Scarlet had tasked the apparently not-dead Peril and her friend to do to her, was presumably not good. Glory had killed her for moons sake. Peril stepped even closer to Glory, so their snouts were almost touching. Hawk tried to protest but was whacked in the face by her tail (no burn marks?). The dragon's eyes were like garnets as she peered into Glory's eyes. Glory glared back, but not even she was prepared for what happened next.

"We're going to get you out of here."

Chapter Seven - How to Escape a Prison

Glory couldn't help but snort in amusement. *Yeah right.* Hawk seemed stunned into silence, which was odd. *He must be a good actor. I'm sure that Scarlet would have given instructions to both of them on how to kill me. Yet, his astonishment did seem sincere.*

Hawk and Peril started to undo the shackles on her legs. Peril's scales brushed against Glory's several times, and she now knew with complete certainty that this SkyWing had lost her most powerful means of defense. *I have a chance now,* Glory realized, preparing her muscles to attack. There was only the binding on jaws. Peril undid the bindings and reached up her claws to pull off the muzzle.

Glory was faster. She ripped off the muzzle and launched herself onto the SkyWing. She pinned Peril's shoulders to the ground and got ready to use her acid if it became necessary.

"What are you up to, you soulless SkyWing?" Glory demanded, digging her claws into Peril's shoulders. "Why is the coward Scarlet here herself to kill me?"

"Glory don't!" Hawk exclaimed. Bounded over to Peril's side. "She doesn't remember anything. Peril doesn't even have her fire anymore."

"How would that matter?" Glory glared at him. "This is still the same dragon who kill hundreds of dragons as a follower of Scarlet." Then, turning back to the dragon squirming underneath her claws, "The same dragon who would have killed Tsunami and me without a second thought."

Peril finally spoke up. "While you bring up very good points, I can't recall ever doing those things to you or any other dragons for that matter." Peril stopped trying to free herself and looked into Glory's eyes. "I am very sorry for what I almost did to you and your friend,

but that isn't me. At least not anymore," her eyes drifted over flameless scales.

Seconds ticked by as Glory gathered her thoughts. *This was the same dragon that she had killed, right? And it wasn't just any death but rather a pole through her back. How was she alive right now, and how could she possibly trust Peril.*

"Please, Glory," Peril pleaded desperately. "Scarlet has planned for your friends to be killed in the arena within the hour."

There was no other option then. She had to trust Peril. *I'm doing this for them.*

Glory stepped off of Peril, who sighed in relief. Hawk also let out his breath, which I don't think he had realized he had been holding.

"Alright, I will trust you SkyWings. But if I even *think* that you are about to betray me or my friends, then I will not hesitate to hurt you in a way that you won't forget."

Peril rolled her eyes, then told Glory the plan.

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There were so many variables in this so-called "plan", which was honestly a very generous way to describe it. Basically, Glory was supposed to disguise herself as a SkyWing, by camouflaging her scales into shades of red and orange (I guess that was somehow stealthier than turning invisible). After that, they would walk through the halls and hope any guards they encountered would be sleeping. If they weren't, Glory was meant to threaten them with her burning acid that would "Burn the scales off of you if you come any closer, do you hear me you evil SkyWing, ROARRGGHH!"

Next was the hardest part: they had to walk past the open doors to Scarlet's throne room without her noticing them. There would be two SkyWing guards standing at the entrance. Oh, and it is worth mentioning that Scarlet herself would be sitting on the throne facing their direction during that time.

Here was where phases two of their grand plan came in. Since Hawk was the only dragon that Scarlet would not feel the need to capture or kill instantly, his job was to distract the guards.

The three certainly-not-suspicious dragons managed to get through the prison without any trouble. The only guards they had encountered was one that had fallen asleep (big surprise there) and a group of three that were playing a card game to pass the time.

They were only one turn away from the throne room entrance. Peril and Glory stopped here. Hawk had no choice but to do this part alone.

His face was quite pale, and he almost tripped while turning the corner, but his voice was steady when he spoke to the guards.

"Guards, guards! I must speak to the queen immediately!" He yelled, at them. The guards could be heard quickly moving in front of him, and holding him back.

"Her Majesty wishes to be left alone right now." One of the guards stated firmly.

"Yeah, she doesn't want to be disturbed by anyone until the execution. Says that's the only thing that'll cheer her up."

Hawk was undeterred. He had expected this reaction and knew exactly what needed to be said to change their minds. "But it is about her prisoner, the RainWing. She has escaped!" There was silence as the guards presumably wondered whether they would get punished if they let in this SkyWing, even if he seemed to have information that she would want to hear.

"Fine," the first guard said gruffly, "But don't expect her to take this news well."

Peril and Glory listened as he broke into a run towards the queen's throne. His footsteps could barely be heard by the time he reached the end of the long room. They couldn't hear his voice, but an angry shriek from the queen was enough for them to know that she got the message.

Scarlet flew straight to the guards at the entrance. "WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE GUARDING THE RAINWING?" her voice boomed.

"Uhhh, I think it was Whirlwind's shift right now, Your Highness," The SkyWing gulped, undoubtedly prepared for more shouting from his queen. "YOU RUN THE PRISON AND MAKE SURE THAT THIS SKYWING IS TELLING THE TRUTH," Scarlet screamed at the first guard. "AND YOU, GET TOGETHER OUR FASTEST FLIERS AND SEARCH EVERYWHERE, ESPECIALLY THE ARENA PILLARS WHERE HER FRIENDS WERE KEPT."

The first guard's footsteps sounded closer and closer. Peril pressed herself closer to the wall, and Glory spread her wings and changed her scales to match the color of the walls. The guards didn't even look there way as he raced to the prison they had come from.

Glory peered around the pillar. Only Hawk was left standing there. "All clear," he called to them quietly. Glory shifted back into shades of red and orange and flattened her frills against her head once again. Hawk and Glory walked on either side of Peril to hide her from view. This way she wouldn't be easily recognized by any other SkyWing that they might come across.

The trio walked briskly in the direction of the arena with their heads low. Several other dragons carrying food and decorations for the evening fights passed them as they went. Fortunately, these dragons barely glanced their way as they were to busy to slow down.

They rounded the next bend and could see the welcoming sky beyond. This was it, they were almost there.

"Where do you think you three are going?" a dragon slithered out from the shadows, her barbed tail poised menacingly behind her. How could they have been so stupid? Of course, something would go wrong. But why did it have to be her? Why was the only dragon to notice them none other than Princess Burn, heir to the SandWing throne?

Chapter Eight - When Luck Burns Out

For better or for worse, Burn still hadn't recognized Peril in between Glory and Hawk. She wasn't sure what to do. Should they run? Hawk could fly faster than Burn since he was a SkyWing, but Glory probably would not be able to. Peril would normally be able to, but she was still weak. If it came to a fight, Hawk didn't seem to have much of a fighter's instinct, and Peril had no fire. Glory was the only one who could fight back, but what if several more guards came? They wouldn't stand a chance.

There was one chance that they had, but it all depended on whether of not Burn had heard the rumors around the kingdom. Still, it might work.

"Don't you DARE take a STEP closer Burn!" Peril's voice boomed. She tried to sound as threatening as Queen Scarlet and seemed to succeed at least for the most part. Burn stopped moving towards them as Peril stepped out from between her two friends (acquaintances?).

"That's not possible. I watched you die." She said quietly, which was odd for Burn.

"I can't be killed that easily. You don't know much about dragons born with firescales do you?" Laughed Peril, her voice becoming steadier with each word. "It's true, the pole was made from neverburn which is unaffected by fire. It's true, that the wound was enough to kill me. Unfortunately for you," she smiled as viciously as she could manage, "dying only makings dragons like me stronger." *Please don't touch me, please don't realize I am only bluffing.*

Burn's face scrunched up suggesting she was unsure of what to do. Should she fly away and warn Queen Scarlet or stay and try to fight Peril and her newfound friends.

"Don't make the wrong choice. Even a powerful SandWing like yourself is no match for the fiery scales I was born with." Peril spoke up again, hoping to give her an extra nudge.

"Fine, I will let you live THIS time," said the SandWing princess in frustration. She stomped off down the corridor. Peril breathed a sigh of relief before turning towards her friends. A hint of a grin passed over Glory's face, and Hawk looked thoroughly grateful for that close call to be over.

"Nice bluff, but we need to rescue my friends now before Burn realizes it."

"And before Queen Scarlet finds us," Hawk added with a gulp.

"Alright, Hawk and I will go free Clay, Starflight, and Tsunami, while you go look for Sunny," Glory nodded at Peril.

"You got it. Your friends will be safe by the end of the day." Peril told her confidently.

If only it were that easy...

Chapter Nine - Where Are They?

Hawk and Glory swiftly made their way to the arena just outside. The harsh mid-day light stung Glory's eyes after being away from it for over a day.

"Your scales..." Hawk marveled, watching how they when from a dull reddish-orange to the bright colors only a RainWing could possibly have. "They look amazing." He smiled shyly at her and Glory immediately focused on making her scales a more boring SkyWIng color while rolling her eyes. If that was an attempt to make her like him, sorry but it wouldn't work. Glory wasn't particularly into dragons of the same tribe who had just kidnapped her and nearly ripped out her precious fangs.

"Let's just find my friends and so we get out of here." They soared on the outskirts of the arena, only a wing-length from the pillars that chained Scarlet's prisoners.

After going in a circle around the arena twice and causing several guards to peer up at them suspiciously, Glory was forced to accept something. That something was the fact that none of her friends were there in more. She growled in frustration.

HOW had Scarlet KNOWN??? One of her guards must have realized that I wasn't a SkyWing and reported it back to her.

"They can't be far," it was an attempt at reassuring her, but nothing Hawk could say would make her feel better. Her friends were gone and the only dragon who could possibly know of their whereabouts was Scarlet. Glory spun around in the air to go back the way she had come, and collided with another dragon.

"GLORY!" the orange fire-less dragon shouted in surprise and alarm. Her face was contorted with... Fear? How could that be? Peril didn't get scared. Though I suppose it was easy to be fearless when you

had scales that could not be touched by another dragon.

"What is it Peril?" She questioned after steadying herself in the air while Hawk flew to her side.

"The SandWing," she gasped. "Sunny. She's gone."

"Wait how do you know this, we weren't even sure where she was in the first place." Glory reminded her former enemy.

"There was this cage." She explained quickly. "It was hanging in one of the rooms. The door was hanging open and when I got closer I noticed that there were scales at the bottom of the cage. SANDWING scales."

"Okay, but that could have belonged to anyone right?" Scarlet had many SandWing prisoners chained up at the arena since Blaze had most of her tribe's support, not Burn.

"They were GOLDEN, and I don't know about YOU, but I have only seen ONE SandWing look like at this arena so far."

"Alright, alright, I agree." the RainWing gave in. "Then where is she? She has to be with the other's right? I mean if I were Queen Scarlet and I knew that my precious "artwork" had escaped before revenge killing her, then I would want to hide all her friends and..." realization suddenly dawned on her.

"She wants to trade. Me for their lives." Glory stated this matter-of-factly.

"Nope," the other SkyWing piped up for the first time during this whole conversation. Maybe he was secretly a RainWIng since he was so good at being invisible. "No way are we going back to Queen Scarlet. She would have all of our heads Well, at least Peril and I's," he corrected himself. "For you, she would want to rip out your fangs and probably torture you for a while with fire and/or sharp objects. Maybe she would even get one of the SandWings to stab you with their..."

"And I am going to stop you there. I think I get the picture," Glory glared at him so fiercely that Hawk's wings actually faltered. "There

is no point in you two following me to your deaths." Hawk nodded in agreement and Glory noticed his muscles visibly relax.

"You really care about them enough to fly straight to your death for them?" Peril asked in astonishment. Her face scrunched up as if she was trying to think of why Glory would possibly be willing to do that.

"Just promise me one thing. Make sure they get out of here safely." Peril dipped her head and held Glory's gaze for a moment. Hawk looked slightly more nervous, but he didn't argue. Glory shifted her scales to their regular blue-green color and fanned out her frills. Several SkyWings started to shout in alarm, but Glory ignored them as she dove.

It wasn't hard to find Scarlet, she stood just in front of the throne room giving orders left and right. One SKyWIng even had to duck as she swung one of her wings toward her face.

"I know what you want Scarlet, so let's just get this over with. Where are my friends." Scarlet stopped giving orders and turned around slowly to face Glory.

"Splendid of you to show up," she mused. "I was wondering how many futile minutes you would spend looking for you annoying friends. I was actually starting to think of the many clever ways I could kill them if you hadn't come back," the corners of her mouth curved into a wicked smile.

"Where are they Scarlet," Glory hissed. She was not in the mood for the Queen's games right now. Not that she ever was.

"I will free them once you surrender to my guards," her tail flicked almost imperceptively, and five burly AkyWings armed with spears and chains crept out of the shadows to surround her.

"I'm not an idiot, you psychotic firebreather. Let them go first!" Glory shouted while eyeing the guards. She kept her mouth open slightly, ready to use her venom in the blink of an eye.

Scarlet's smile faded into an agitated frown. "I told Burn that you

were smarter than that." The Queen didn't seem pleased to be right about this though. "Fortunately, I prepared for this." She breathed fire at Glory, but this was just a distraction.

The SkyWing soldiers suddenly charged at her. She immediately made her scales blend in with the background, but it was too late. They already had their talons on her, and took hardly andy time to bound her wings and throw a chain around her neck.

Glory spit her acid on the chain causing it to snap in two and even had time to strike two guards with her venom, but there was no way she could have known what would come next. A dragon suddenly dropped from the ceiling and landed squarely on her back. Glory whipped her neck around and opened her jaw to expose her fangs, but the SandWing -- Burn -- had expected this and quickly clamped her mouth shut. She even made sure to shove a muzzle over Glory's mouth once again.

Burn got off of the RainWing and Scarlet towered over Glory.

"Do you know what's going to happen to your friends?" Glory snorted angrily at Scarlet, but there was nothing she could do to free herself now.

"Of course not, so I will tell you. Your funny looking SandWing is already on her way to Burn's stronghold. There, her strange tail and golden scales will be put on display until Burn realizes how much work it is to take care of a living abomination and decides to have her stuffed." Scarlet continued to stare into Glory's eyes intently. She wanted to savor this moment.

"The NightWing, Starflier or whatever his name is, will stay at this palace as my guest of honor." She stopped herself, chuckled, then continued. "Well, I think you should know that by 'guest' I really mean 'exotic pet' since NightWings are so rare to find these days."

"Seeing that the MudWing is too soft for the arena, I have decided to have my guards chain him to the bottom of the nearby lake where he can drown slowly."

"Your SeaWing friend on the other talon has a real fighting spirit, so

I have decided to giver her the honor of being my next champion in the arena, after the death of my former champion," she spat as if Peril's death was an inconvenience to her Majesty. "But don't you fret. Once your fangs are out, I will let you watch."

"Guards, take her to the infirmary RIGHT NOW. I want those fangs out today!"

Chapter Ten - Venomous

Pain.

That was all that Glory could feel.

She had been floating in and out of consciousness for... Hours? Days?

Flashes of light and the sounds of tools working were the only other signs that she was alive.

Wait, has the torture stopped? The pain certainly hadn't. It was still there, strong as ever. Glory could feel every individual scale burning from whatever they had done to her. *The feeling of being constantly poked, prodded, and stabbed had finally stopped though. Why?*

Glory felt several dragons lift her body off the table. She tried to protest, but barely a whimper left her aching jaws and there was no way she would be able to force her muscles to move.

After a few minutes she managed to open her eyes slightly, but the moment she did so her eyes were blasted by the blinding rays of the sun. *Outside? The only place outside that I can think of Scarlet moving me to is the arena. But I am in no condition to fight!* Glory thought in alarm. The dragons carrying her suddenly dove down and tossed her roughly onto the arena sand. Before she had a chance to even lift her head, one of the guards pressed her snout into the ground while the others chained her to the ground.

It's not like I have the energy to fight you right now even if I wanted to (which I do)! She hissed at them internally.

"GATHER AROUND MY SUBJECTS!" That was Scarlet's voice. Glory could just make out the dark orange scales from her low vantage point. "I am SURE all of you remember that YESTERDAY was my HATCHING DAY. If you did not remember then you are either an IDIOT or a TRAITOR to your Queen and should therefore not be

here in the first place!"

"ANYWAYS," she changed the subject back, "Today you might recognize the dragon who RUINED MY SPECIAL DAY yesterday." There were several gasps from the crowd and the shuffling of claws suggested that some of them had backed away, recalling her ability to spit acid. Glory *wished* she could shoot her acid at Scarlet's smug face right now.

"Don't be afraid, she is perfectly harmless now," Scarlet reassured them, not able to contain the note of triumph in her voice. "I punished her in a way that she will NEVER forget. Come close and see for yourself. Marvel at the work of my most talented subjects and let this be a warning to ANYONE in the audience who even thought for a SECOND that they could go against me without SERIOUS repercussions." With that, she waved one wing at the guards holding Glory. They promptly stepped away, allowing Glory to raise her head. The RainWing quickly noticed that she wore a collar studded with scarlet gems. Chains extended from both sides to keep her from escaping.

Several dragons from the audience had already landed in the arena to get a closer look. Glory weakly got to her talons and hissed at them, fanning out her frills and baring her... Fangs. She reached up to touch her fangs, but there were only two empty spaces in her gums where they should be.

No, no, no, NO! This can't *be happening.* Her heart pounded faster against her chest as she surveyed the rest of the damage Scarlet had caused to her.

She looked at the collar again and realized why it hurt *so* much. The metal had been welded to her scales by SkyWing fire. That wasn't even the worst of it. Almost every inch of her scales had been tattooed with red ink. *No, not red*, she realized in disgust. *My scales have been colored scarlet.*

Almost everything that made her tribe unique had been taken from her. A MudWing walked up to her cautiously, but once she noticed GLory's fangs were gone she could only gaze at her with fascinated horror. A SkyWing poked her tail and Glory tried spinning around

to swipe at him with her claws. The chains binding her were pulled taut and all she managed to do was cause a burning sensation around her entire neck. She shrieked in pain and faced forward again.

Scarlet was directly in front of her. The SkyWing Queen's snout was only inches from Glory when she spoke, "You thought your life as my artwork was a miserable existence, but now you get to be my pet," Scarlet snarled. She stared intently into Glory's eyes for a reaction, but Glory held her gaze unflinchingly.

For a moment, Glory was convinced that the queen would retaliate in some way when she refused to cower in fear. Then Scarlet blinked once, and the sides up her mouth curled up into a venomous smile.

Chapter Eleven - One Of A Kind

"This is bad! This is really really ba--"

"SKIES ABOVE, if you say that ONE more time I swear I will rip out your tongue and SHOVE IT DOWN YOUR THROAT!" Peril shouted, whipping her head around to face Hawk. He scowled at her but shut his mouth hastily.

"Do you know what would be helpful?" Peril asked her friend (acquaintance?), "If you could think of some way to help get that RainWing out of there." She traced one talon in the dirt, then stomped on her drawing.

Hawk and Peril had been perched on top of the mountain that borders the arena ever since Queen Scarlet gave the announcement that something big would happen today. To be honest, Peril thought that it would be just another fight, maybe with one of the new scavengers that had been brought in earlier that morning.

But nope. Instead, it was a RainWing that had been tortured, shamed, and put on display for all of Queen Scarlet's followers. *I bet this is mostly for the dragons she trusts the least*, Peril suddenly understood. *She is the type of Queen that would rather scare her subjects into obedience than earn their respect through good leadership.*

Think Peril. THINK! She kicked a stone off the mountain. It rolled down the mountain several paces then hit something with a soft *clink*.

"What was that?" asked Hawk, putting on his very-curious-must-check-that-out-now face.

"Uhh, a rock?" She replied helpfully.

"No, I mean the thing it hit," he said, already bounding down the mountain to check it out. "Wow," he breathed after sliding to a halt.

"Do you mind filling me in on what 'wow' means Hawk?"

"It's a bag full of treasure." You would think this dragon had never seen treasure in his life with the level of reverence in his voice.

"Queen Scarlet literally has gold *dripping* from her walls," Peril pointed out, infinitely unimpressed. "Your point?"

"My POINT," he explained dramatically, "Is that all treasure is AWESOME."

Peril raised her eyebrows at him. "Spoken like EVERY SINGLE dragon from here to the ice kingdom." Hawk snorted smoke in her direction, then proceeded to scoop the treasure back into the bag to place around his neck.

"No way," Peril snatched the bag from his talons.

"Hey!" His spines bristled in dismay.

"If what you say is true, and I did have fiery scales before I died, that means I have never gotten to wear any accessories in my WHOLE ENTIRE LIFE," Peril reminded the SkyWing. "That is a HUGE deal. Plus," she smiled mischievously, "it looks WAY better on me." He shot a glare at her, then as if this conversation had never happened, then jumped into the sky.

"Let's go visit the SkyWing markets." He suggested seemingly out of thin air.

"Hawk, either your brain has turned to bird poop or you seem to be forgetting that we are in the middle of planning a rescue operation," Peril put in gently. Well, gentle for *her* anyways.

"My brain is fine, thank you very much," he told her just as a mosquito landed on his snout causing him to nearly fall out of the sky trying to smash it. "I just think it might be a good idea to go try and recruit people to help us or something." Peril looked at him doubtfully. "Okay, I know it's not a good plan, but at least it's something!" Hawk protested defiantly. "It's not like you have come up with anything yet."

"I've come up with several ways to bring you immediate pain," Peril muttered not-so-quietly. Hawk pretended not to hear as he took off towards the SkyWing encampments.

~ ~ ~

Peril vaguely remembered coming to the center of SkyWing life from her memories. She couldn't remember faces or details, but more general things from her childhood had started coming back to her. Some such examples included which stands had the best smelling food or the angriest shopkeepers.

Even though she remembered a few things from this part of the kingdom, it wasn't much. Not because Peril couldn't think back, but rather the fact that she hadn't come here very often. *Dragons probably didn't want to risk me burning their merchandise. Or their scales.* This theory was further proved by how dragons left a wide path for her and several shopkeepers shut their doors and windows the moment she walked near.

At one stall there was a friendly looking SkyWing selling handmade earrings and bracelets. Her face lit up the moment the spotted Hawk in the crowd. "Hawk!" she called out in delight. "I haven't seen you in days!" she exclaimed, wrapping him up in a hug.

"Sorry Harrier, but I had to help some new friends of mine." He gestured to Peril who had been walking alongside him. Peril waved awkwardly, and Harrier hissed at her.

"Hawk, I know that sometimes you get confused," she paused, "Okay, you get confused A LOT, but I think your brain must have turned to ashes recently for you to all of a sudden make friends with a mass killer."

"What is it with dragons thinking there is something wrong with my brain today?!" Hawk snorted in indignation.

"I can think of about twenty reasons off the top of my--"

"La la la, I am NOT listening to you right now!" Hawk shouted, covering his ears. Peril sighed as Hawk was pulled away by the

golden-brown dragon.

Peril tried not to listen to their clearly private conversation, but she couldn't help making out phrases like "but that *thing* is a monster!" and "there is no way I am trusting *that* dragon." After several minutes of going back and forth, Hawk came back to Peril while Harrier stayed where she was.

"My sister says she doesn't trust you but is not willing to let me go risk my life without her or something like that."

"She actually agreed to help?" Peril asked in utter bewilderment.

"Yes, but on one condition..." Haw began before Harrier cut in.

"We are not going to kill any dragons," she stated, padding over to stand by her brother.

"I wasn't planning on it," Peril spat. This dragon didn't know Peril, so who was she to judge her?

"So tell me the plan," Harrier demanded. Fortunately for Peril, before she could tell her that there, in fact, wasn't one, a SandWing bolted over to the stall that Harrier had been working at. He grabbed an expensive looking set of gold earrings and tried to take off with it.

"HEY!" Peril voice drowned out Harrier and Hawk's shouts. "Give that BACK you sand-snorter!"

To the surprise of all three dragons, the SandWing stopped in his tracks so suddenly that Peril though he would fall on his face, then turned around. He slowly walked straight to the stand and placed the earrings back.

"Huh?" Peril thought out loud. The SandWing started stepping back to run away again, but Peril called him over to her. Again he listened.

"Sit down," Peril demanded. He did it, but his eyes were wide in shock, and all the SandWing's muscles were tensed as if he was trying to go anywhere but there.

"Umm, stand up, turn around five times, then stand on three legs." Again, the SandWing obeyed her every command, still looking just as perplexed.

"I'm going to ask you a question that I really want you to answer with complete honesty," Hawk said with the most serious face Peril had on him ever. "Are you an animus?"

"Not that I know of." Peril took off the bag she was carrying and took a coin from inside. "I enchant this coin to whack Hawk on his ugly snout." The coin stayed on her palm looking perfectly content to remain there forever.

"SandWing thief, go whack Hawk lightly on the snout." The SandWing did just that, even though Hawk tried to move away.

"Hey, couldn't you have tested that in literally ANY other way?"

"Yeah, but at least now we know that my powers seem to only work on this guy right here."

"I have a name you know, Murderous Pet of Queen Scarlet."

"I have one too, Lowly Crook of Queen... Oh wait, you don't have one," she retaliated.

"Maybe it's not you," Harrier speculated. "What else is in that pouch?"

"Just some more coins and some other cool treasure," informed Hawk as Peril dumped out the contents. "I think they got it off of one of the scavengers a few guards delivered to Queen Scarlet."

Dozens of coins plunked onto the ground along with a bracelet, two gems, and a blue statue. They all looked unimportant to Peril. That is until Harrier gasped.

"That can't be what I think it is, right?" Her eyes were wide in awe.

"What? What is it?" Peril questioned her impatiently.

"The Lazulite Dragon," Harrier said, hardly able to contain her

excitement.

"Did I forget to mention that my sister loves to study ancient artifacts in her free time?" Hawk rolled his eyes, but a smile passed over his face. "She knows practically everything there is to know about odd pieces of art or bizarre statues. She's always getting excited about random things like this."

"RANDOM THINGS LIKE THIS!" she shrieked so loud that almost every dragon near them glanced up from what they were doing just to glare at her. "The Lazulite Dragon is ONE OF A KIND and has been missing for GENERATIONS. It was rumored to be kept by Oasis before her death though," The SkyWing mumbled the last part to herself.

"Ookkkaaayyyy..." Peril thought, looking over at the SandWing to notice he had frozen in place, looking as though the ghost of his former Queen had appeared on the mountainside in front of him.

"No, you don't get it," Harrier shook her head. "This particular statue is animus-touched. It has the ability to grant the user control over any member of the SandWing tribe."

Both Hawk and Peril stared at the little stone dragon. Peril held the object up to the sun making light dance across its sapphire-blue surface.

She looked directly at Hawk. "I think this is the key to saving our friend."

Chapter Twelve - One Shall Die

Night had come and gone since Glory was chained up in the middle of the arena. She had tried to get some sleep, but could not rest knowing that her friends were about to die and Glory could do nothing to stop Scarlet.

The natural defenses that made a RainWing so dangerous -- camouflage and venom -- had been stripped from her mercilessly.

Now the sun rose above the arena, casting light over the empty stands. Within the next few hours, dragons would start trickling in to watch the fight between Tsunami and her unknown opponent. In the past few days that Glory had been at the Kingdom of Sky, Scarlet had always named the dragons going into the arena a day in advance. This time it was different. *Because of me...*

Glory ended up being right. The closer the sun came to its peak, the fuller the stands got. When they were nearly full, several burly guards flew on each side of Glory to lift her off the arena sands. *I guess Scarlet only wants me to witness my friend's demise, instead of partaking in it with her*, she realized.

There was no point in struggling. Not only was Glory still weak from the previous days, but worry and lack of sleep had left her emotionally drained. She hung limply as the guards carried her next to the side where Burn watched the battles. On the side opposite of her was where Glory had slept as Scarlet's "artwork". The marble tree that had been her perch was still there.

Suddenly the entire audience burst into applause. Scarlet was here. She flew in from her palace with Burn and Vermilion following just behind her. Scarlet stood for a moment as if she were judging the crowd before her, then sat down on her arena throne. Burn leaned towards Scarlet and whispered something but the SkyWing Queen waved her off. Burn held her tongue but looked thoroughly displeased.

Scarlet gestured to a nearby guard who disappeared for a moment, only to reappear with... Starflight! *He looks miserable,* Glory noticed immediately. His head and tail hung down as they carried him over to the tree. The guards chained his mouth shut and secured him to the tree with a much stronger chain than Glory had been given. It took every bit of self-control for Glory to hold back a shout to get his attention. She was almost positive that kind of outburst would worsen Starflight's life even more.

Vermillion cleared his throat. "Welcome again to everyone for what will be yet another exciting match. As of now, you likely all heard the rumors that Tsunami will be the first participant in today's fight, but the Queen only told me mere minutes ago who the second fighter would be." He took a deep breath before continuing. "Her Majesty has decided that Tsunami of the SeaWings will fight against King Gill AND Prince Fin of the SeaWings!"

The crowd roared in excitement as Glory looked on in horror. It was bad enough that they were forcing Glory to fight against members of her own tribe, but two dragons?! Her death was inevitable at this point.

It took several minutes for the prisoners to be brought down for the fight, but eventually, there were three very dangerous looking SeaWings poised on the arena sands. King Gill stood in front of his son, growling ferociously at his opponent. Tsunami locked eyes with her friends. Glory had never felt so helpless in her life.

"Ready your talons, bare your teeth, and FIGHT!"

Tsunami began to circle her enemies, looking for weaknesses. Glory had seen her do this with Kestrel many times in their underground home.

King Gill lashed out at her with his talons spread wide, but she managed to dodge it and get in a solid whack with her tail.

If only we had stayed under that mountain.

The king snarled in outrage and leaped at the blue SeaWing. He pinned her down and dug his back claws into her belly. Tsunami

shrieked, but was able to loosen his grip by biting his left talon. The moment he pulled his arm away, Tsunami took the opportunity to push off his other leg, slide out from under him, and push him onto his back.

With the roles reversed, Tsunami managed to hold his arms and legs down with her own. Before he had a chance to try the same trick to escape, she thrust her head forward, and latched onto his neck with her jaws. He froze. This was the end. Glory made eye contact with Tsunami for a moment. The look on her Tsunami's face made Glory feel like either ripping Scarlet to pieces or crying for her sister (and she had only cried once in her life). Tsunami Glanced from Scarlet, to the crowd, and finally, to the helpless dragon underneath her.

Glory knew what she was thinking: this dragon was a prisoner to the arena just as she was, and didn't deserve to die this way. She also knew that the only way Tsunami could walk away from this fight was by killing both dragons.

Tsunami closed her eyes and snapped his neck swiftly.

She stepped slowly off the corpse of the king and turned to face her next enemy. He came at her from behind before she could blink and raked his claws down her left-wing. Tsunami cried out in pain and spun around. She hissed at him and prepared to use her tail again, but he had retreated to the far side of the arena. Tsunami limped towards him with a murderous look in her eyes.

The Prince suddenly looked very frightened. He was only a dragonet and had just been forced to witness the death of his father. His moment of bravery had been short-lived when Prince Fin realized that he was no match for this dragon.

Glory caught movement from where Burn was sitting. The SandWing princess had gotten up from her place next to Scarlet and now stood over the Queen.

Burn looked as if she wasn't in control of her own talons.

Tsunami was only a tail-length between murdering a dragon old enough to be her brother.

Scarlet's ally stood with claws outstretched just inches from the queen.

Glory's sister crouched down to jump.

The SandWing slowly reached for Scarlet's throat.

The SeaWing pinned down an innocent ready to slice his throat.

Someone screamed. The crowd scattered in chaos as they grasped that Burn was about to murder their beloved queen. Scarlet jumped up from her seat and spun around just in time. Burn's talons swiped at empty space. For a short second Burn looked at the Queen in utter shock. But a second was all it took for Scarlet wrap her talons around the SandWing and snap her neck.

Burn was dead.

And somehow Glory knew it wasn't the SandWing's fault.

Chapter Thirteen - Repercussions

"Oops." Peril looked down at the lazulite dragon in her talons, then back at Burn's body.

"I cannot BELIEVE you right now!" Harrier roared at her. "Do you have any idea what sort of repercussions might come from this disaster?" Peril opened her mouth to say something sarcastic back, but the fiery SkyWing continued. "No, of COURSE you don't. You never think about the consequences of your actions. Take a look at the stadium right now. What do you see?"

Peril squinted at the crowd. "Err, dragons?"

"Wrong."

"Well technically she's righ--" Hawk tried to point out, but Harrier didn't care.

"This fireless dragon is *wrong* in my eyes because what *I* see are three distinct tribes sitting in peace together. And do you know why all these different tribes would do this in the middle of a war?" She shook her head. "What am I saying, of course you don't know." Harrier took a deep breath. "These dragons are only together because they are allies. If Burn is *dead*, then that means she isn't going to be queen. If she isn't going to be queen, there is no reason for Queen Scarlet to ally with all these tribes."

"Now that leaves two tribes -- the MudWings and the SkyWings if you've been listening -- that have two choices: pull out of the war and become a neutral tribe, or stay in the war but support a different SandWing sister." Harrier pointed to the MudWings. "Queen Moorhen only allied with Burn because of threats to her own tribe, so she will likely stay out of the war from now on." She pointed to Queen Scarlet. "We were never told what the SkyWings were promised, but knowing our queen, she will probably want to

stay in the war just so that her arena can remain full of war prisoners and her thirst for bloodshed can be quenched."

"The most important part of this history-in-the-making lesson is that, assuming all these theories are correct, this means that Queen Scarlet will likely ally with one of the other sisters. I know it won't be Blaze because Queen Scarlet believes she has no stomach for death and would make a terrible queen. This leaves only one conclusion: not only does Blister have the SeaWings on her side, but now she has the SkyWings as well. The IceWings will be smart enough to stay on their side of the Great Ice Cliff so as to NOT DIE, while Blaze is left completely exposed for Blister and her forces."

Harrier exhaled. Both her brother and Peril had their mouths hanging wide open. "Congratulations," she spat at Peril. "You just chose the next SandWing Queen."

Chapter Fourteen - New Alliances

"Well that was thrilling," Scarlet remarked as she slid Burn's corpse off the balcony.

Most of the dragons were still focused on the fight, booing at the lack of blood and gore.

"Kill the scrawny one!"

"Don't stop!"

"I paid good money for this seat!"

Slowly, the sounds of shouting fans died away, as they noticed where Tsunami's gaze was directed: the body of Princess Burn. Once all the watching dragons noticed, a hush fell over the crowd. Queen Scarlet looked furious.

"Guards, come collect this dragon's body, it is ruining the mood."

A burly golden SkyWing and a dark orange one shook out their wings and shared a glance with each other. Glory assumed it meant something along the lines of "Well if we refuse the Queen will kill us" or "It's not like Burn was a good dragon anyways." The two SkyWing heaved Burn up into the air and carried her over the side of the arena. Every dragon looked on in shock.

They were all asking the same question, but no one wanted to speak it out loud, for that would make it real.

What happens now.

Queen Scarlet adjusted herself on the throne to look more regal, then addressed her subjects with a frustrated hiss. "What you all just witnessed, was my ALLY trying to MURDER me." She glared at the

SandWings in the crowd, causing some to shrink back with fear. "This was a completely uncalled for, unprovoked assassination attempt that clearly *failed*, and will *certainly* not go unpunished." Scarlet tapped her chin, as if coming up with the most gruesome and thrilling way to carry out this 'punishment'.

Scarlet suddenly leaped into the sky and dove towards the stands. Every dragon in the vicinity tried to quickly get out of the vicious Queen's way, but one was not so lucky. Scarlet had her eyes on a SandWing, which she instantly pinned to stands, pressing the pale yellow dragon's barbed tail into the stone.

"Every single one of you desert-scum will now be considered as traitors to me," she spat, digging her claws into this SandWing's sides.

"We have done nothing wrong!" Shouted one bold SandWing.

"This was a surprise to us too!" Yelled another desperately.

Scarlet kept her gaze trained on the dragon below her, but addressed the entire audience: "For any SkyWing who wants to prove their loyalty to me, I want EVERY SANDWING in this arena adorned with chains. and FILLING my prisons!"

With the SkyWings being the fastest tribe in Pyrrhia along with outnumbering the SandWing guests five to one, the SandWings barely had the chance to lift off before several SkyWings were upon them, dragging them to the prison cells in the sky.

"I have something else that I need you to do for me," Scarlet hissed with a malicious tone. The SandWing only glared back fiercely, her venomous tail twitching underneath the orange SkyWing's grip. "Go to Burn's stronghold and tell every SandWing there that the alliance is off."

"And if I don't?" The pale dragon spat.

"If you don't," Scarlet replied coldly, "I will *rip* off your poisonous tail and *shove* it down your hideous throat."

Glory had been straining so much to hear the conversation between

Scarlet and her unlucky prey, that Glory failed to notice two suspicious SkyWings until they were right in front of her.

"Your amazing rescuers have to come to... well, rescue you, DUH." Peril started to quickly undo the chains.

"Where did you get a key?"

"That is beside the point here," Peril rolled her eyes, continuing to fumble with the lock.

"She scared a guard into giving it to her by threatening to 'melt him in half.'" Hawk informed her with a straight face.

"You look terrible!" The third SkyWing exclaimed in shock, risking a glance over at the heartless monster their tribe calls 'Queen Scarlet'.

"I've seen better days," Glory gritted her teeth as Peril yanked the chain off of her collar.

Have I? Glory suddenly wondered, thinking back to her days under the mountain. *At least there I had my friends*, she thought anxiously remembering her friends. "We have to get Starflight!" The RainWing exclaimed suddenly.

"The Nightwing?" Hawk tilted his head in confusion. "But why."

"Because he is one of the Dragonets of Destiny you idiot." The SkyWing whacked him lightly over the head. *They must be brother and sister*, Glory realized.

Hawk took the keys from Peril as soon as she finished undoing the last binding. "I wish I could get the collar off you but..." Peril trailed off awkwardly.

Glory nodded in understanding, then stretched her wings. Her scales felt as though they were burning every time she moved, but there was nothing she could do about it. Glory tried her best to ignore the pain as she raced over to Starflight. Hawk had just finished unshackling him.

"Are you okay?" Glory demanded.

"I'm fine, but you on the other hand -- I can't even -- what Scarlet did--"

"Yeah, I know, but right now we have bigger problems. Like saving the rest of our friends. We have to hurry though." Glory looked anxiously at the Sky where Scarlet's soldiers where just about finished imprisoning the SandWings. *At least Scarlet is still focused on that SandWing.*

Glory *s*uddenly remembered that Tsunami had been in the arena before all this chaos happened. She jumped into the air to go rescue her sister, but when she spun around the fierce blue SeaWing was already flying towards her with the smaller SeaWing she had wrestled with earlier. The female SkyWing that had helped free Glory was flying in front of them triumphantly.

"Glory!" Tsunami shouted. "I am going to MURDER THAT--"

"SHUSH!" Glory hushed her quickly, "We don't exactly want her to notice we are escaping do we?" Tsunami lashed her tail furiously and the little SeaWing had to swiftly duck his head to avoid getting thumped. "How did you escape anyways?" Glory puzzled.

"Harrier over here knew some trick to unlocking the wing bindings," Tsunami said, nodding to the SkyWing.

"A SkyWing trade secret I guess," Harrier winked.

"I know you all want to catch up, but can we maybe hold off this heartfelt reunion stuff until after we GET THE SCORCHING SUNS OUT OF HERE. Just a thought." Peril suggested, taking off towards the mountains. They all followed after her, somehow managing to escape the SkyWing Queen and her loyal guards.

~ ~ ~

As it turns out, Harrier also knew exactly where to find Clay. It was lucky too, for the MudWing would not have been able to hold his breath for more than a few more minutes.

"You all came to rescue me!" Clay yelled in delight, tackling

Tsunami then throwing his wings around Starflight. When he came to Glory however, he looked angrier than she had ever seen him in his entire life.

"How could anyone, let alone a Queen do this to you? How could a dragon even think up such horrible ideas?" He protested, reaching out one talon to touch the collar but noticed the painful burn marks around it and pulled back hastily. "And wait, where's Sunny?"

Glory excitement in seeing her brother faded quickly.

"Queen Scarlet had her sent to Burn's stronghold hours ago, we might still be able to catch them if--" Starflight began but something caught his attention.

"What is it?" Peril asked, trying to spot what he was seeing.

"It's that SandWing," Hawk remembered, "The one that the Queen had pinned down.

"Oh!" Prince Fin spoke up for the first time since he was freed from the arena. "I heard Queen Scarlet tell that dragon to go to the stronghold and tell the dragons there the alliance was off."

"I heard that too," Glory nodded.

"But she said something else too," The prince continued. "She told that SandWing that after she delivered that message, she was to go find Blister and tell her that she now has Queen Scarlet's full support."

"We need to stop her then!" Harrier said in dismay. "We can't let her win. If we do, she will take the throne and maybe use the army that comes with it to kill every IceWing and MudWing she comes across for not supporting her in the war!"

"That sounds awful," Clay agreed, shaking the rest of the water from his scales.

"What can we do then? We don't have time to rescue Sunny AND stop a messenger." Starflight pointed out.

"We do if the SandWing is already headed to the stronghold." Glory realized, already taking to the sky. "All we have to do is follow that messenger."

Chapter Fifteen - The Messenger

Why did SHE have to take orders from that psychopathic Queen? Onyx thought to herself. If any of those foolish tribes had realized that she was a princess *just* like the three idiotic sisters, then they would have allied themselves with her in a heartbeat. *Not that I would have let an inferior tribe ally with me in the first place, of course*, she scoffed.

Onyx stopped herself midair. Was that the sound of faint wingbeats she was hearing. Onyx spun around suspiciously to look behind her, but the skies were eerily empty.

I bet all the SkyWings are busy bowing and scraping to their 'beloved queen' as they imprison MY subjects. Oh, and the MudWings also, though they hardly matter compared to our *greatness.*

She tossed her head back towards the Claws of Clouds Mountains. She was almost there, and beyond that was *her* kingdom. Her wonderfully warm Kingdom of Sand.

Onyx stopped flying again. A brilliant thought had just occurred to her, one that she had not been able to consider before. *With Burn gone, who is to stop me take me from taking the throne? There is no one left there with any real power, other than her father.* Palm had said that the SandWing Prince would support her no matter what anyway, so she wasn't that worried. Her wings suddenly felt full of energy.

Once she was there, everyone would realize that it was HER destiny to rule the SandWings. Everyone knew that the other three were horrible choices and that each SandWing was only choosing to follow the one they hated less. That was why she had been with Burn after all. Blaze was a blithering idiot who only cared about vanity while her sister Blister could be trusted no more than a

dragon claiming they were from the *"Lost Continent"*, which obviously didn't exist.

So naturally, with those two as her only other options, Burn was the clear choice. She wasn't afraid to get her talons bloody for her tribe and she always followed through on her threats.

Just as I will.

Onyx flew as fast as her wings could carry her, oblivious to the darkening storm clouds.

~ ~ ~

By the time Onyx reached the mountain range the storm had gotten much worse. Rain pelted her scales and wind whipped at her wings trying to drag her off course. Flashes of lightning could be seen from her position in the sky with only a few seconds between bolts. Even with her strength from years upon years of battle training, the SandWing struggled to stay aloft. If Onyx didn't find shelter soon she would be joining Burn, wherever it was that dragons went after they died.

The pale SandWing dove towards a clearing. There was a cave right by the spot that she was aiming for if she could just land safely. *Safely* being the keyword here.

The ground got closer and closer. Her wings were starting to cramp with strain. Not only did she have to worry about staying in the air, but she also had to make sure she ended up in the exact spot she was aiming fo, all while the wind buffeted her already exhausted body.

Almost there.

Just several more wing-beats if I'm lucky.

Onyx should have realized by now that luck was not something had been born with. It all started with being hatched under the hot desert sun instead of on the cool stone floors of the palace. Now it was about to end with her being catapulted into a bone-chilling

torrent of water.

Before she even had a chance to shriek, the freezing water engulfed her body. She barely had time to hold her breath before she was thrown underwater.

There was no way to tell which way was up or down. Fear gripped her heart as Onyx was pulled through the ravine. Rocks pierced her scales as she was thrown against them many times over.

I can't give up now. There is no *way that I am going to go out this way!* Onyx thought fiercely, although her brain felt muddled from the lack of oxygen. She tucked her wings against her sides and started kicking and clawing her way to the surface with everything she had.

Air! Onyx quickly took a breath before she was thrown back underwater. She kicked up again and tried to see if there was anything she could grab onto downriver.

Through the pelting rain and the churning waters, her sharp eyes noticed something caught on the rocks up ahead. A large tree almost certainly knocked over in the storm lay precariously across the roaring river. One side of it lay in the water while the other was much higher and attached to the steep riverbank. If she stayed true to her current course, Onyx would miss the tree completely.

Come on Onyx, you can do this, she told herself with determination. *It's this or death by drowning, and I definitely know which of those two I would prefer.*

She propelled herself forward by sheer force of will. Visions of her sitting regally on the SandWing throne while her subjects bowed and praised her kept playing on repeat in her head. *Do it for your tribe. Do it for the SandWings.*

Using her powerful wings Onyx launched herself out of the water. She let out a grunt as her chest rammed against the top of the log. She dug in her front talons and tried to kick up her legs, but every ounce of strength had vanished. After hours of flying and then struggling to swim in this frigid river, her body had nothing more to

give.

"No," Onyx cried weakly as her front talons began to lose their grip. "No!" She yelled at the sky. Finally, her claws gave out and Onyx plummeted back down to her inevitable fate.

Onyx's body slipped back into the cold water and her head fell below the surface. This was the end.

She went limp and allowed death to take her.

Strong claws suddenly gripped both her arms and pulled her back up towards the surface. Fresh air suddenly greeted the SandWing and she gasped for breath.

On either side of her was a blue dragon. *SeaWings?* Onyx's brain managed to put into a coherent thought. *But they were allied with Blister.*

The bigger SeaWing looked strikingly familiar. *Wait, that's -- that's one of those Dragonets of Destiny,* Onyx realized in shock. She finally recognized the smaller male SeaWing as the one that the female had fought in the arena. *But they had been fighting each other to the death mere hours ago. How could they work together so readily now?*

A brown dragon stood on the log, reaching out his talons to her. The SeaWings boosted Onyx to the large MudWing (Clay?) and then were helped out of the water by a RainWing and a SkyWing. Wait, not just any SkyWing. *Peril? What the -- that's not -- how was this even possible?* That dragon was the most feared dragon in the Sky Kingdom, and notoriously known as Scarlet's arena champion.

Onyx slowly faded in and out of consciousness, but there was one moment that she remembered very clearly. She was in a cave laying next to a fire when the MudWing came over and spoke to her in a reassuring voice: "You're safe now. It's going to be okay."

That was when Onyx fell unconscious again, but the image of the MudWing's kind eyes stayed in her mind even as she was swept away by the familiar embrace of sleep.

Chapter Sixteen - Catching Up

"I still can't believe you're my brother!" Tsunami exclaimed for about the hundredth time, nudging Fin's wing happily. Peril saw the smaller SeaWing smile back.

"Me and thirty-one others," he laughed in response. "Mother will be ecstatic to know that you are alive. I had never seen her more upset than the day you went missing. In fact, I think she killed all three of the dragons who were guarding the nursery at the time." He flinched, no doubt remembering just how violent his mother could be."

"And the chaos in the Mud kingdom all those years ago..." Harrier chatted with Starflight on the other side of the bonfire. "I can't believe that Heron beat the other three for the throne, even though she came from the lowest-born MudWings."

"I know right!" Starflight agreed, his voice raised several octaves. "I have never met anyone who cared about history as much as you," he blinked at the SkyWing as if she was some precious gem.

Peril tried not to gag.

At least he was happy.

Glory, on the other hand, had most of her face turned away from Peril, but sometimes she would turn her head slightly to look at the damage caused by Queen Scarlet. *Arrrggh, I can't believe that* my own tribe's queen *would do this to anyone, especially a RainWing. They aren't even in this moon-blasted war.*

Hawk snored loudly right next to Peril. WHY he had chosen to sleep by HER was still a mystery. *I guess I'm just lucky then*, she thought, rolling her eyes.

Oddly, the MudWing Clay had chosen a spot quite near to the messenger. He was watching everyone around the fire, but Peril

saw him glance over at the SandWing every once in a while with worry and... Something else.

"ARRRRGGHHH!!!" The SandWing jolted awake, all her limbs tense as if prepared for an invisible threat. Her tail was poised above her head, ready to strike if need be.

"It's alright, your okay!" Clay spoke up first, causing the messenger to face him. The instant her eyes locked with his, however, her demeanor changed completely. She became visibly calmer within a matter of seconds and her tail curled back into the much safer resting pose.

"You're the one who pulled me from the water, aren't you?" Her voice still sounded harsh, but her eyes were softened.

"Well I think we should get helped a litt--" The SeaWing prince elbowed his sister, cutting her off.

"Err, yeah," Clay smiled sheepishly. "Though I did get some help from my friends." He waved his wing around the room. The SandWIng turned her head to assess each one of us.

"Hmm..." The messenger narrowed her eyes when she got to Peril. "And what is *she* doing here?"

"Peril's with us now-- umm..." The MudWing looked to the stranger for a response.

"Princess Onyx, the one and only suitable heir to the SandWing throne."

Most of the surrounding dragons looked on with confusion as well as shock, but not Harrier. "So the rumors were true? Smolder really did have a lover named Palm whom he hatched an egg with?"

"Obviously," Onyx rolled her eyes.

Starflight looked as if someone had just given him a crate full of treasure. *So what, a dragon randomly shows up claiming to be queen. Now maybe it is true, but she could just as easily be lying.*

"How do we know you're not lying?" Apparently Glory was thinking the same thing.

"How can you not see the resemblance?" Harrier's jaw dropped incredulously and her tail accidentally sent several rocks flying.

"This is great!" Clay exclaimed. "We were all soooo worried about choosing the next SandWIng Queen since they are all quite awful from what we've heard. Now it doesn't matter though, since YOU can be the next queen!" The way Onyx looked at Clay as he spoke made her seem to believe it even more. *Bleck*.

"Wow, wow, wow..." Tsunami began.

"That doesn't mean we just want some long-lost princess we've never met to become queen instead!" The RainWing continued for her.

"And how do you propose I prove to you that I'd make a good queen without getting the chance to be one?" She raised an eyebrow at the dragons against her leadership.

Glory and Tsunami shared a glance.

"She DOES have a point you know," Hawk stretched like a cat then went over to sit by Onyx to her surprise.

"I don't know about you guys, but clearly Blaze and Blister shouldn't be Queen. They are the reason we are in this war in the first place." This got several nods of agreement from the watching dragons.

"We are heading to the palace anyways right now to free Sunny. It would be much easier to do that with her on our side, and hey, if the SandWings don't even want to follow her than what's the harm?"

Peril glared at Hawk. Why did he have to think of something so logically sound that she was practically forced to agree? "As much as I hate to say this -- and really, I do -- I think Hawk is right."

The other dragons looked to Peril in surprise.

"I'm not quite sure how my brother came up with that," Harrier winked at her brother who glared in turn, "But it makes sense to me."

Clay looked from Tsunami to Starlight to Glory. When none of them objected, the MudWing turned to the SandWing and grinned at her, "I guess that means you're sticking with us?"

Onyx smiled back in a way that made her seem... nervous? "At least until we get to my kingdom to rescue your friend. *I don't understand these two dragons.* Peril snorted going back to her sleeping corner.

A thought suddenly occured to her as she drifted off into sleep. *What would happen if the SandWings didn't accept Onyx as their new queen? Would the war even end, or was bloodshed just the nature of the tribes?*

As she slept, her dreams were filled with the corpses of hundreds upon thousands of souls lost to this moon-blasted war.

Chapter Seventeen - Land of Scorpions

"Rise and shine!" Clay shouted cheerfully, his voice reverberating off the cave walls.

"RRAAARRRGHHH!" Was Peril and Tsunami's simultaneous reply.

"We have to go NOW. Sunny's out there all alone and we have to get her back and she's probably so scared and wondering where we are and--"

Tsunami put a talon on Clay's shoulder to stop him. "We know Clay, we're all worried about her too. *None* of us," she glared pointedly at Peril, "mind getting up so early if it means rescuing Sunny."

Clay smiled in response as everyone else got up from their slumber and stretched out their wings. Onyx was slightly annoyed that she had to fly with this misfit group of dragons across the Kingdom of Sand. Especially since the sheer vastness of her territory and the sun beating down would hinder this group's speed.

Onyx had been awake for several hours already. Her mind kept mulling over the fact that in the next twenty-four hours she had a chance -- a real chance -- to lead her tribe as queen of the SandWings. Although she had wanted this all her life, there was still a small part of her that felt anxious. Will I be a good queen? Will the SandWings accept me? Will Blister kill me the moment she learns of my heritage?

Blaze was not a problem and Burn -- although a serious threat before -- was now dead. Unfortunately, this left the most dangerous and intelligent sister for Onyx to deal with.

Blister was the only dragon standing between Onyx and her own rise to power.

"Onyx," a voice cut through her thoughts, "Did you sleep alright?" It was Clay. She tilted her head at the MudWing. Onyx was still convinced his niceness was only temporary and he would soon realize that 'friend' was not a word in her vocabulary.

Still, he seemed so sincere. Onyx had never met someone who hated her so little.

"Yes, I did," that was a lie, but she didn't have the heart to tell him the truth. *What is wrong with me?* Onyx grumbled internally. *Why do I care what I tell him and what he thinks of me as a result? He's just another distraction from my real mission. Plus,* she reminded herself, *he's not even a SandWing.*

"Can we get out of this wretched cave yet?" Onyx demanded, heading towards the opening without waiting for the others. She thought she had caught a glimpse of disappointment on the MudWing's face, but she decided to ignore it.

Onyx closed her eyes and took a deep breath as the sun's rays danced across her scales. Now that the chill of the storm had passed, she could feel the warmer air drifting from the Sand Kingdom. She had only been gone for several days, but it had felt like an eternity.

"RACE YOU OUTSIDE!" The voice belonged to the immature male SkyWing. How the others tolerated him was a mystery to her.

"YOU STAND NO CHANCE AGAINST *ME*!" Peril shouted back as the two of them burst from the cave entrance at exactly the same moment.

"Told you so!" The female shouted triumphantly, looping in the sky.

"That is so not true," the other SkyWing protested, standing up a few talon-lengths taller. "I beat you fair and square and you know it, Peril!"

The SandWing heir looked up to the sky. *Sky's above, just help me get through this journey!*

"Alright, we better get going now," This time it was the fiery

SeaWing who walked outside, followed closely by the little SeaWing, the talks-a-lot SkyWing, the nerdy NightWing, the damaged RainWing and... Clay.

STOP THINKING ABOUT HIM YOU LIZARD-BRAINED FOOL! Onyx screamed at herself, leaping into the air to distance herself from the MudWing. She could feel his gaze on her as the rest of the group took to the skies.

It didn't take long before the mountains turned to sand and the heat of the sun began to weigh down her traveling companions. And after flying in the general direction of the stronghold for hours with no sight of its sun-bleached walls, it was no surprise when Peril finally spoke up.

"I don't want to question your sense of direction or whatever Tsunami, but are you SURE we are headed in the right direction?"

Tsunami tried to be reassuring with an "Of course we are!" but Onyx saw her wings falter.

"Why don't we let the SandWing lead the way?" the young SeaWing suggested. "This is *her* tribe's territory after all."

"No, I CAN'T." Onyx snorted indignantly. Although it *was* her territory and she *should* know her way around it, she and her mother had only really lived in the Northern region of the kingdom. They had moved around a lot but only within a small area that her mother had deemed "safer-than-the-rest-of-this-kingdom".

Onyx had thought it was total camel-dung that she couldn't explore the rest of it, but her mother had insisted.

And Palm certainly NEVER allowed her to go towards the stronghold. Being seen there would have been a death sentence for the both of them.

"Look!" Hawk exclaimed excitedly. If it wasn't a mirage, then there was some sort of dragon-made structure in the distance. She couldn't tell what it was at first, or even once they got close, all Onyx knew was that it wasn't the stronghold.

"The Scorpion Den?!" Harrier brought her talons to her face. "We went too far south!"

The entire group (except Onyx) groaned in a very undignified way. "Well I don't know about you guys, but my wings need a break," the NightWing panted, struggling to keep up with the others.

"I guess we could rest at this 'Scorpion Den' place then." Clay's response to the NightWing was quickly shot down by Harrier.

"Don't you know how dangerous this place is?" She asked incredulously as they all touched down onto the ground. "It is practically crawling with criminals and no-gooders. Going there would be a bad idea, especially if they saw all of us different-tribes traveling together in one group."

"We could split up then," Peril suggested causing Hawk to edge closer to her.

"I don't know if that's such a great idea either, but it is probably better than staying together," admitted the annoyingly knowledgeable SkyWing. "Though wait," she suddenly realized. "A NightWing will draw way too much attention and especially you Glory. You two will have to stay behind and stay hidden. The rest of us go in to find food and water to bring back."

"I'll stay with them!" Clay volunteered automatically, going to stand by his two friends. Onyx felt a tinge of what was certainly not jealously.

"No," Harrier told him while shaking her head. "Tsunami and her brother should since they would also draw too many eyes on them."

Tsunami looked slightly upset by the prospect of staying behind, but for once she didn't argue.

"That leaves myself, Peril, Hawk, Clay, and..." Harrier trailed off with a frown.

"And me," Onyx supplied with a growl. "Yeah, the feeling's mutual."

"The five of us walking inside the Scorpion Den together would

probably still be a little too suspicious, but I don't know if we would want to, erm, split up any more than we have to," her gaze fell once again on Onyx.

"I can go with Onyx," Clay volunteered without missing a beat.

Great, just what I need, the SandWing couldn't help but think to herself.

"Fine, we'll go in first then." after seeing Harriers puzzled face. "Well, you didn't think we would all enter the Scorpion Den at the same time did you?" *Do all these dragons have brains full of sand or something?*

"Good thinking!" Agreed the MudWing who Onyx once again ignored. She wasn't going to talk to him any more than she absolutely had to.

She leaped into the sky once again, this time with only a MudWing to keep her company. Not that she needed the company, of course. She had lived alone long enough to know how to keep her mind occupied with her own thoughts.

They flew in silence, with Onyx refusing to acknowledge the glances that Clay kept throwing her way. *He'll give up eventually,* she reassured herself. But for once she wasn't quite sure.

Once they got to the entrance they were greeted by a single guard. He had been sleeping only moments earlier. That is, until he heard their wingbeats causing him to jerk awake. *They seem to take security seriously around here.*

"Name and reason for bein' here," the SandWing guard demanded gruffly. His words had been directed at Onyx, and the moment his gaze turned to Clay his eyes narrowed and his venomous tail twitched. *Judging by his numerous scars and demeanor towards Clay, he probably fought against the MudWings in the war before coming here.*

"Onyx," she replied coldly. "And this is Clay."

"It's unusual to see two differen' tribes travelin' together nowadays, except in war. We don't allow current soldiers into the Scorpion

Den."

"Oh, we're not current soldiers," Onyx snorted. "And that is no way to speak to your future queen." Clay scrunched up his face as if he didn't think she should have mentioned that. *I am not going to hide who I am*, she thought as she shot a glare at the MudWing.

The guard laughed so hard he had to use his spear to hold himself up. Once he finally regained some of his composure he told Onyx, "Yeah, and I'm secretly a jackrabbit. Go back to whatever crazy hole you crawl'd outta!"

"Hey, don't talk to her like that!" Clay exclaimed at the same time that Onyx leaped onto the dragon.

"I am the daughter of Prince Smolder and his secret lover Palm," she hissed in his ear as the dragon struggled below her. Clay tried to intervene, but Onyx growled at him to stay back. "You may have even heard rumors of their 'forbidden romance' and how Oasis killed my mother," she continued. "The story of their relationship was true, but my mother didn't die before she had me and taught me of my destiny. That I am heir to the throne of the SandWings."

"Teeth of the viper, what in the BLAZES is going on here?" Onyx looked up in surprise at a sandy yellow SandWing with brown speckles trailing down her back and wings. Around her neck, she wore a moonstone necklace. At one side of her stood a large male SandWing with six-claws instead of five. At her left was a serious-looking dragonet with speckles on his snout.

"This crazy dragon is claimin' to be heir to the throne!" the dragon under Onyx exclaimed as she let him wriggle free.

"Oh did she?" The dragon raised an eyebrow.

"I did and I am," Onyx snapped, straightening herself up.

"Whether you are lying or telling the truth, I think we should have a little talk." She gestured for them to follow. Onyx made eye contact with Clay who nodded for her to go on. He followed behind her in almost a protective way as the dragon with six claws walked

directly by her side.

"We don't take well to mysterious dragons attacking our guards and claiming to be some lost princess." The dragon told Onyx as they walked. "Surely you can understand why extra precautions must be taken."

"I'm sorry, but I don't even know your name," Onyx pointed out with a growl at her guard who had gotten just a little too close. "And I don't take well to mysterious dragons without a name."

"Excuse me for my poor manners!" she chuckled. "The name's Thorn, and I'm the one in charge of this fine establishment."

Chapter Eighteen - The Outclaws

"So it's true then?" Thorn breathed in amazement. "You really ARE the fourth heir to the SandWing throne?"

"Obviously," Onyx replied, rolling her eyes.

"Isn't this great," Clay suddenly cut in from his spot near 'Six-Claws' (why his parents named him that is a mystery). "Now she can be queen instead of the other two--"

"Two?" Thorn cut in, passing a puzzling look from Clay to Onyx.

"Burn is dead." The SandWing heir replied bluntly before Clay could jump in and sugarcoat in like he usually did with things.

"Not that I'm complaining, but how did she die? Burn wasn't exactly a dragon I'd call 'weak.'"

"No one's sure what happened, but in the end, it was Scarlet's talons that took the princess's life," Onyx informed Thorn and noticed that Clay was looking everywhere but at her. *What are you hiding MudWing?* She narrowed her eyes at him before returning her gaze to the other SandWing.

"Hmm," Thorn tapped her chin, "I must say that I don't trust either of the remaining princesses to lead my tribe. That is the reason my Scorpion Den is so full of dragons in the first place; they needed the type of escape from war that this place could give them. But the question I have is this: how would you be any better than those two? I know what type of queen Blister and Blaze would be, but what about you?"

Onyx was not prepared for this question. Why *was* she a better fit for the role of queen than the Blister and Blaze, other than just being better than them in general, that is?

"She is smart, but not malicious," Clay piped up, keeping his eyes on Thorn. "She was cunning enough to escape Queen Scarlet's claws and strong enough to survive nearly drowning in a river. And finally," this time his eyes locked onto Onyx and she couldn't look away, "Onyx has the heart of a true SandWing. She is the only real heir to the SandWing throne."

Thorn's eyes narrowed at a stunned Onyx. "Your MudWing friend here makes a convincing argument, but I still need proof." The SandWing thought for a moment then stood up. "Come, follow me outside."

The sun seemed even brighter than before as they stepped out of the shaded tent. The hustle and bustle of the markets immediately put Onyx on edge again, and she uncurled her venomous tail unconsciously.

"If you really are the right fit for the throne, then my Outclaws and I will support you and help you seize the throne from that nasty Blister. But in order for me to trust you, you must prove that you are worthy of my trust."

Just as she said those words, yells broke out from a nearby stall along with the sounds of broken pots and collapsing tents.

"Prove to me that you can be a leader and we will help you." Thorn gestured to the commotion and Onyx sprinted towards the sound without hesitation.

The scene in front of her happened to be caused by three SkyWings.

Harrier, Hawk, and Peril.

Peril was lying on the ground bleeding out onto the street while Hawk held her head in his talons. "Stay with us Peril, DON'T YOU DIE ON ME!"

Harrier was scanning the crowd and attempting to stop the bleeding simultaneously. Seeing no immediate threat, Onyx pulled a drape from one of the nearby stalls (much to the owner's displeasure) and ran up to the SkyWings. "What happened?" Onyx demanded as she

handed the cloth to Harrier to stop the bleeding.

Her voice was shaky, but Harrier managed to get her words out, "There was this-this SandWing who appeared out of nowhere." Even though she struggled to speak, her talons never faltered as she helped save Peril's life. "It all happened so fast-he said it was for his sister-something about the arena."

"And did they look like, the dragon that did this? Were there any distinguishing features or--"

"It's wings!" She exclaimed, "The SandWing's wings were a much darker brown than normal and one of them was so badly injured that it dragged along the ground."

Onyx ordered Hawk to take her place holding the wound, then took off to take care of the attempted-murderer. She didn't even notice that a certain little SandWing had been trailing her this entire time. A SandWing with a scar on his nose and speckles on his snout.

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After several frustrating minutes of searching around the outskirts, she finally spotted the dragon she was after. *Got you!* Onyx tackled the SandWing, trapping him against the ground and being careful to hold his poisonous tail out of the way with her own. Apparently, she was making a habit of pinning strange dragons to the ground in this "Scorpion Den".

Several shopkeepers in the vicinity moved their merchandise away from the wrestling dragons on the ground. They gave such annoyed glances that Onyx nearly stopped pursuing this target to go after one of them.

"Why did you try to kill my frien-- my travel companion? Speak or I will slit your other wing!" Her harsh words had the desired effect though a surprising answer.

"Hey, what are you doing you maniac! I haven't tried to kill anyone since the war, that's why I moved to this darn town." The SandWing glared at Onyx who tried her hardest to keep confusion from

crossing her face.

"I know it was you, so don't bother lying you good-for-nothing lizard-eater." Onyx leaned in even closer so that her face was right in front of his. "An acquaintance of mine described the assassin as having dark brown scales and a wing slashed through so bad it dragged on the ground. I doubt you know anyone else that fits that description so perfectly."

"Look," the dragon sighed, "If I had killed a dragon, I think I would know it. Besides, do you even have any evidence?"

Onyx narrowed her eyes but stopped when something in the dragon's bag caught her eye.

"What's in the bag, SandWing?"

"Uhh, a piece of pottery that I bought just now for my mother on her hatching day. Is that a crime?" Onyx leg go of one of the dragon's arms and ordered him to dump the contents on the ground.

The strange SandWing wasn't wrong about the pottery being there, but it certainly wasn't in one piece. In fact, one of the larger shards had a crimson liquid dripping from the pointed end.

"What?!" he cried from under her, his eyes widening at the state of his gift. "It's all destroyed!" Tears formed in his eyes and Onyx rolled her eyes.

"That is beside the point you idiot, don't you see the blood?"

The SandWing opened his mouth but failed to form any words. Something else was going on here.

This dragon had the murder weapon, but he sure as moons didn't make an attempt on Peril's life.

Onyx scooped up the shards and took to the air before the SandWing could make a fuss about her stealing his mother's pottery. She noticed that her traveling companions had not moved, though Clay had joined them and was helping Harrier bandage up the SkyWing's neck. The SandWing dropped the contents in her arms

sending them clattering at Harrier's feet.

"Piece of pottery?" Harrier asked in confusion. "That's what nearly killed Peril?"

"I interrogated the dragon that did this to Peril and it wasn't him. And I know that no one slipped the murder weapon into his bag because the pottery belongs to him. What on earth is going on."

Harrier began shaking her head, but suddenly it dawned on her, "This wasn't just some revenge against Peril, this was a result of her using the lazulite dragon."

"What do you mean? Hasn't the lazulite dragon been lost?"

"It has..." Harrier tried to explain before another dragon cut in.

"But we found it and Peril accidentally used it to make Burn kill Scarlet." Clay looked down in the ground in shame after keeping this from Onyx this entire time. *I shouldn't be surprised, he is a MudWing after all.*

"Although I am furious all of you for withholding this information, what does this have to do with Peril's injuries now.

"Whatever deed you do with that object, the deed will come back to you. She tried getting Burn to assassinate the SkyWing queen and now she has had an attempt on her own life."

"But Burn never went through with it, so she's going to be fine, right?" Not that Onyx cared about any of these dragons. She just had to get used to caring for other dragons in a queenly way. You know, for the respect of her subjects.

"She is now, but the wound is deep. It was definitely a close call."

A large SandWing materialized next to Onyx. "Well done princess, I'm impressed with how you handled everything." It was that dragon Thorn again. "I tasked Qibli here," she gestured to the little SandWing who held his head high, "in following you to the assassin to see how you would handle it. Six-Claws here thought you would kill him, but I guess I won that bet." She let out a bellowing laugh

as Six-Claws handed her a coin.

"I just did what any SandWing would do--"

"No, Onyx, you handled the situation with intelligence and the killer with mercy. That is the kind of Queen my Outclaws would follow-- the type we *will* follow." Thorn bowed her head at the startled Onyx. "We are at your service, Princess Onyx."

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Although somewhat shocked to see that Onyx had been traveling with two SeaWings, a rather funny-looking NightWing, and a very tortured RainWing, the Outclaw leader didn't ask about it. And Onyx was happy not to explain. It wasn't as though she wanted to travel with this bunch either.

They took off from the Scorpion Den a few hours past noon and reached the stronghold at sunset. The flight itself was easy, but once they reached their destination they immediately knew something was wrong.

There were no sentries guarding the stronghold; not even a single worker could be seen carrying out their duties on the grounds. It was completely and utterly empty... Or so it appeared.

"What in three moons is THAT!" the little SandWing exclaimed, pointing just within the outer walls of the palace. *What in three moons is right,* Onyx thought grimly.

Within the walls, SandWing soldiers stood in perfect rows and columns, all facing one dragon. A dragon with a pattern of black diamonds trailing her pale, sand-colored scales.

Blister was already here.

And she had assembled an army.

Chapter Nineteen - The Fourth Heir

Onyx drove straight towards the crowd before any of the others could stop her. This wasn't their fight, it was hers.

She was immediately circled by the group of SandWings. Well, immediately after they got over the shock of her landing in their ranks, that is. Hundreds of SandWings had their barbed tails at the ready, and every single one of them had an eye trained on Onyx. But she had expected this type of reaction towards her arrival.

"Hello fellow SandWings, my name is Onyx and I..." she held her head high and wings spread wide, "Am the fourth heir to the SandWing throne."

Cries of outrage and shock rippled through the army, but the only dragon Onyx noticed was the one who stood at Blister's side. This dragon looked like Blister's twin, with the same pale scales and black diamond pattern running down his back. And although they weren't twins, they were unmistakenly brother and sister. This dragon was Prince Smolder.

My father, Onyx thought coldly, remembering all the times as a young dragonet that she had wished this dragon would show up. That he would find his daughter and embrace her in his wings. But he never did.

The look on his face was one of pure disbelief and joy. Onyx thought it really didn't suit him, especially seeing how menacing his nearly identical sister looked beside him. And all those pouches and keys, who did he think he wa--

"Onyx?" The dragon known as Smolder stepped towards her as the crowd parted and grew silent. Only now were they realizing just whose daughter this was.

"So it's true?" whispered one.

"I thought Oasis killed Palm!" shouted another.

"I had heard rumors, but..." a freckled SandWing remarked in awe.

"I always knew you were alive." That voice was Smolder's. "I looked everywhere, but I had no idea where you might be, where you might have--"

"Oh, save it Smolder," Onyx spat. He stopped in his tracks, an injured adorning his face. "If you had really cared for me, for mother, then you would have never -- NEVER -- stopped looking for us." She stared the SandWing down so intensely, that he was forced to break eye contact and hang his head in shame.

This entire time, Blister hadn't spoken a single word, but now she broke her silence, "Hmm, so I have a niece then. How lovely." Her tone of voice couldn't contradict her words any more than they did at this moment. Both dragons knew that this reunion would be cut short; one of them was going to be dead by the end of the night. "Well, I can tell that you are much more like me than my idiotic sister Blaze, so you know how this is going to work."

It wasn't a question but Onyx replied anyway. "Burn is dead and we both know Blaze is as fit for the throne as a shark is for land, so it's up to us to fight to the death. *Here* and *now*. No tricks, no getting other dragons to fight our battles for us," Blister narrowed her eyes at this last remark. "Just the two of us in a duel for queenship."

"But what about the Eye of Onyx?" Smolder interrupted, breaking free from his daze. "You-you can't fight without it."

Is he trying to protect me? Onyx shook her head. *It's too late to start acting like my father, Smolder.*

"We can and we will," Onyx objected, digging her claws into the sand in preparation. Blister ordered the surrounding dragons to form a circle for them to fight in. The princess wanted to get it over with, so she was going to have the fight happen right where they stood.

Onyx could see her friends stuck behind the mass of SandWings. Most of her other companions had the same level of concern for her, but Clay looked particularly worried. Almost like he actually cared.

Thorn's expression stood out even more than the MudWing's. She nodded to Onyx with a look of determination. Thorn trusted her to win, so that was what she had to do. There was no way Onyx would let this conniving SandWing princess take the throne.

Smolder stood between the two heirs. "Umm, alright. Are you both ready?"

"*Yes*, Smolder," Blister hissed, "Let's just get this over with."

Smolder gulped and clamped his hand around a key on his neck. It seemed to calm him because not a few seconds passed before he cleared his throat and instructed them to begin the fight. "May the true Queen of Sand win."

Blister bolted forward as soon as Smolder spoke those final words. She barreled into Onyx whose slow reaction resulted in a gash to her side. Luckily, it wasn't from Blister's poisonous tail but was still deep nonetheless and the younger SandWing grunted in pain.

Onyx roared in anger and threw several fast blows at her opponent though none of them hit the diamond-backed SandWing.

"Too slow my little niece," Blister sneered as her tail bashed into Onyx's head. Spots formed in her vision, but she shook her head. *I have to beat her. If I don't, she becomes queen and I would hate to see what Blister would do with all that power.*

Onyx whipped in a circle, knocking Blister's legs out from under her. The princess yelped in surprise as she landed on her side onto the sand.

Not wasting a single moment, Onyx leaped at the larger SandWing and pinned her to the ground. A lethal tail was aimed for Onyx's heart, but she pinned Blister's tail faster than you could say 'camel-dung'.

"Do you think I've never fought a SandWing?" Onyx spat as she aimed her own tail at Blister's heart. The princess bared her teeth in anger, but then the edges of her mouth turned up into a hideous smile.

"No, but you've never fought *ME*." A numb feeling slowly worked its way up Onyx's body, started from the back leg that she had used to pin the princess's tail with.

"What did you do to me?!" She exclaimed, leaping off of Blister to look at her leg. Under her scales were several pin mark-sized wounds from which a purplish liquid oozed.

Blister waved her barbed tail in front of Onyx, revealing a band of minuscule spikes attached below the base of her barb. "Nearly as poisonous as dragonbite viper venom, this poison extracted from a rare rainforest plant is capable of killing its prey within minutes. It slowly works its way to the heart, paralyzing every part of the body it passes on its path." She raised the ridges above her eyes, "It seems you are already experiencing that effect, in fact," she observed, noticing how Onyx could hardly put any weight on her limp foot.

"This fight is over, so you might as well surrender yourself to me," her eyes gleamed at the prospect of becoming queen in mere minutes.

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"I knew that scheming heap of cow-dung would try something like this," Thorn growled as she watched. Glory silently agreed. She had never met Blister, but every account of that SandWing stated that she was extremely cunning and willing to do anything to get what she wants. So long as her claws didn't get too dirty that is.

"We have to help *somehow*!" Clay exclaimed, anxiously watching Onyx as she attempted to circle the princess with a prominent limp.

"We can't intervene in an official duel for queenship," retorted Harrier. "They have to fight without help from anyone."

"But Blister just cheated!" shouted Tsunami, her tail nearly

whacking an unsuspecting Fin in the head.

"Yeah, surely that has to count for something!" Peril added, the frustration in her voice plain as day. Glory tried to rack her brain for some idea, ANY idea that might help in this hopeless situation. *If only there was a way that we could help Onyx without anyone knowing.*

That's when she remembered a very valuable object that they had in their possession.

"The Lazulite Dragon!" Glory half-shouted half-whispered so as to not alert the crowd of dragons surrounding them. "Knowing Blister, she would not risk carrying a poisonous venom on her tail if she didn't have the antidote with her at all times. What if we made her give up the antidote to Onyx, though secretly to not draw attention from everyone else?"

"That *could* work..." Harrier began, "Though there are always ill side-effects with this animus-touched object, as you all know, and there is no way to tell what those repercussions might be. It could kill whoever uses it!"

"I'll do it."

Everyone turned their heads to stare at Clay.

"Onyx deserves to be queen way more than Blister does. And we shouldn't let Blister get away with cheating her way to the throne!"

"Are you sure about this?" Glory asked quietly, touching the tip of her wing to Clay's side. "You have no idea what that-- that *thing* will do to you."

Clay took a deep breath. "Yes, I'm sure."

Harrier handed him the Lazulite Dragon and Clay ordered Blister to give up the antidote in words that the others had carefully devised for him.

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"I will never..." *inhale*, "ever..." *exhale, "*give up!" Onyx's breathing had become labored and her movements stiff. At this point, the poison had spread up her entire leg so thoroughly that she could hardly move it.

She circled the grinning princess who wasn't even trying to attack. *And why would she?* Onyx thought grimly. *I'll be dead in a couple of minutes anyway.*

Suddenly Blister's smug look became one of confusion and... Fear? Though the expression she gave was almost unnoticeable, Onyx was good at picking up on the small changes in other dragons. It's the little things that let you know who a dragon truly is.

The princess walked over to the bristling Onyx only to slip something into her talons. "Drink this and your leg will be healed," she whispered into Onyx's ear.

Onyx scoffed at Blister. How dumb did that dragon think she was?

"I know that whatever in that vial is just more poison. I am going to die on my own terms, thank you very much."

Blister's eyes went wide and she looked like she was struggling to speak. Or maybe she was trying *not* to speak.

"Trust me, Onyx, this is definitely the antidote. And if you won't trust this dragon then trust me, Clay."

Onyx's eyes when wide with shock. *He must be using the Lazulite Dragon*, she realized instantly. *That lizard-brain is going to get himself killed!*

Onyx opened her mouth and drained the contents of the vial into her throat.

Blister was released from the power of the Lazulite dragon immediately after Clay had finished speaking to Onyx. She screeched in fury and reached for Onyx but it was too late: the antidote was already working its magic.

"Nooo!" She yelled, tackling Onyx to the ground. Blister dug her

claws into a writhing Onyx. "I will still win, you filthy excuse for a SandWing!" the princess snapped.

Blister opened her mouth to let out a blaze of fire onto the helpless SandWing.

But Onyx wasn't helpless.

Because while she had been laying on the ground at the mercy of her aunt, her talons were cut by something just within reach. And just like the miraculous antidote, this item would prove equally valuable.

Dragonflame cactus.

With no other options and no idea if her plan would work, Onyx ripped the plant out of the ground and flung it into Blister's mouth.

The SandWing's eyes grew wide as the cactus exploded in her mouth from the heat of her flames. Her talons released Onyx a split second before it exploded, allowing the young SandWing to roll to one side and take cover.

Onyx heard the princess's screams as the seed pods tore through her mouth and throat, and in a few moments, she heard a thump as Blister's body slumped to the ground.

Blister was dead,

And Onyx was queen.

Chapter Twenty - Adventure's End

"Onyx! Onyx, are you alright?!"

Clay's voice broke free from the jumble of SandWing cries. The screams of Blister still echoed inside her mind.

"Yeah, yes, I'm alright Clay," Onyx replied, forcing herself to her feet. Only then did she realize that the pain in her leg had not only subsided but disappeared completely. Only the small marks where the poison had entered her bloodstream remained. Although practically microscopic, she was sure the marks would leave scars.

As Clay forced his way through the crowd to her, she noticed the unbalance of his stride. Clay was limping.

"What happened to you?" she asked as he approached her. The wound looked nearly identical to her own before she had taken the antidote. The veins in his leg stood out in a deep purple and his entire leg looked unnaturally pale.

"When I used the Lazulite Dragon, it seems that the penalty was getting the same wound you were being healed of," he shrugged as if him taking her injuries was simple. As if any dragon would have down what he did.

"I don't know why you would do such a thing," then in a much quieter voice she whispered, "Thanks."

Clay smiled at her in that sweet look of his. Before either of them could say another word, the rest of Onyx's companions showed up to check in on her, including a funny looking yellow SandWing that walked between Starflight and Hawk. *That must Sunny, the one they were all so worried about*, she observed with interest.

"Nice fighting skills!" Tsunami nudged Onyx's shoulder with a smile.

"It was a little too violent for me," the small SandWing grimaced with a glance at Blister's blood-covered corpse.

"But it's over now, Sunny," the NightWing reminded her kindly, eliciting a strained smile from her.

"What now?" Hawk asked, putting his wing over Peril's back. She snorted in disgust and slipped his wing off her shoulder as he protested.

"I know what I want to do," Glory noted, glancing at her tattooed body. "Thorn told me that the Scorpion Den has specialists in removing unwanted tattoos."

Clay frowned as if all he wanted to do was take her pain away just as he had taken Onyx's.

How does a dragon like him even exist in such a cruel world?

"We should probably head back to the Sky Kingdom and help sort out the mess there," Harrier informed them, going to stand by her brother. "I would imagine the rest of you will want to go find your families?"

All of the dragonets nodded in unison causing Sunny to laugh.

"I guess this is where we part ways then." Onyx didn't even pose it as a question. They all knew that this was the end of their chaotic and dangerous adventure.

"We don't all have to part ways," Clay looked to Onyx with a nervous smile. "You could come with us you know."

"I wish," and surprisingly, she really did wish to stay with this strange band of misfit dragons, "But I need to be here, serving my fellow SandWings and trying to restore this kingdom to its former glory. To how it was before this whole mess with the SandWIng heirs ruined everything.

Clay nodded. Surely he had expected this answer from her, but he still looked disappointed.

"Off to another adventure then," Tsunami exclaimed as the group split ways.

And although they had to be apart, they would never forget the time they spent together saving lives and stopping a war.